

## Abortion Rights calls for action to tackle harassment outside clinics

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Abortion Rights UK has called for police and law-makers to take steps to end the harassment of staff and patients and prevent delays to provision of medical services. This move follows the news that the first British clinic closure due to protest activity is likely in the next few weeks.

BPAS has set up an NHS-commissioned service in a GP practice in Blackfriars which opened on October 16. Abort67 activists have bombarded the practice with emails and staged several protests specifically targeted at a mother and baby clinic also at the practice. Anti-abortion extremists flooded the area with activists carrying graphic posters, filmed patients coming in and out of the practice. They have openly stated that their intention is to force the practice to stop providing an abortion service.

The practice have now said they are considering withdrawing the service because their staff and patients are distressed by the protestors. BPAS and clinic staff met with the police last week who say they are doing everything they can to control the situation but do not feel existing legislation gives them the space to do this.

If Abort67 were to succeed in this would be the first time anti-abortion extremists have closed down a clinic in Britain. France, the US and Canada, all have specific legislation that protects women or women's health services from activists. For example by establishing a "buffer zone" around such premises where protesters are excluded.

Kate Smurthwaite, Vice Chair of Abortion Rights said "It is essential that staff and patients are able to attend medical centres without being subjected to harassment and intimidation and with their privacy respected."

"We hope police can find a way to use existing legislation on harassment and hate speech to protect staff and patients. If not then the government needs to provide suitable legislation as a matter of urgency."

"We have no interest in limiting protest or free speech but it is clear that there are more legitimate means of exercising those rights than confronting and filming people visiting a medical centre and displaying graphic images in places where children and vulnerable adults are likely to be."

Notes for editors:

- \* Abortion Rights is the UK's national campaign for a woman's right to choose on abortion.
- \* Protests outside abortion clinics have become increasingly widespread in recent years.
- \* Abort67 is an extremist organisation who are notorious for approaching people in the street, displaying graphic images and filming inside and outside NHS and private medical centres.
- \* In 2012 a rape victim described the trauma she experienced after being filmed by Abort67 members at a clinic in Brighton. [http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/9623459.Special-report\\_Pro\\_lifers\\_target\\_Brighton\\_clinic/](http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/9623459.Special-report_Pro_lifers_target_Brighton_clinic/)